

RTM Address

10 May 2004

Evonne M. Klein
First Selectwoman

Thank you.

Good Evening.

It's a pleasure to be here this evening.

I am here tonight to update you on the progress we have made over the past six months to improve our community. But first I would like to thank the members of the boards, commissions, Town employees and members of the community who have worked so tirelessly to help bring about these positive changes. Thank you.

I am proud to say that we have accomplished much in a very short time. Tonight I am going to share with you a few highlights, and hope you will take the time to review the more comprehensive report I've made available to you. Should you have any questions, or want to discuss anything included on this list in more detail, please call, email me or drop by my office.

That is a perfect segue to my first highlight. The Board of Selectmen and I have taken several steps to establish a more open and inclusive dialogue with the Darien Community—to truly listen to the issues, needs and opinions of the people of our town. The link on the Town website and the First Selectwoman's Night Out are two key initiatives, which have furthered our efforts to hear directly from the community. Rest assured, we factor the input we receive into the decisions we make, and work to represent, as best we can, the needs of our Town to the other boards and commissions. In March, we held the first of what will become an annual "Legislative Lobby". We laid out our legislative priorities to our representatives in Hartford. Our objective is to ensure that

our Town Government, Board of Selectmen and our State Representative and Senators are responsive, responsible and accountable to the community.

We have made tremendous strides in addressing a number of issues in Town. In response to the growing demands on our ever-shrinking open and community space, the Town is currently in negotiations to acquire the Procaccini Property. In the 2004/2005 budget we have \$1,580,000 dedicated to improvements in our open and recreational space, including a new boat ramp and the expansion of Casey Field. In the spirit of public private partnership, our budget also includes funds to supplement those raised by the Darien Park Pals to replace the playground at Cherry Lawn Park.

Improvements to the Noroton Heights Train Station have begun and will continue over the next few years. I urge you all to stop by the Noroton Heights Train Station—the interior painting is complete and new seating should be installed by month's end. In July, we will replace the tin roof and install windows. We've just renegotiated the train station contract with the state and have established a separate parking fund in our budget to ensure parking revenues are used to improve and maintain the stations in Town.

You'll notice some improvements downtown as well—both of which will make our Post Road shopping area a more desirable destination for those who choose to walk and shop downtown. The first addresses pedestrian safety and the second, parking. Our crosswalks will receive a new coat of paint and pedestrian crossing signs will be installed to warn motorists to slow down for pedestrians along the Post Road. The Board also took the very simple step of changing the off-street parking times from 1 hr. to 2 hrs. and from 2 hrs. to 3 hrs.; thus giving shoppers the opportunity to enjoy their time downtown.

Looking ahead, with the Playhouse expansion underway and the Grove Street Plaza nearing completion, and our ongoing desire to attract a variety of new businesses to our Town, the Board of Selectmen will meet with the Planning and Zoning Commission to discuss possible changes to our 79 year old parking regulations. I am also in the process applying for a federal grant that would support an overall plan for downtown

improvements to traffic flow and pedestrian access. It is my hope that all of these improvements will make our downtown a more desirable and safe place for walkers, shoppers and motorists.

Through the generosity of the Darien United Way and the hard work of the Social Services Department, Darien Seniors will receive their first issue of the new senior newsletters, “Out and About”.

Compromise and some creative thinking brought several Darien traditions, which were at risk of disappearing, back to our Town this year. Skaters and the Darien Police Department collaborated on a parking plan, which accommodated the needs of skaters, area homeowners and our emergency responders. The Boy Scout Tag Sale returned to great success—adding an additional tent—when one side of the street parking rules were put into effect for the day of the sale. I also hope to have an announcement about the Fourth of July fireworks later this week. We have been conducting a thorough study of possible locations, and have a few final details to work out. Please stay tuned.

You resoundingly passed Tax Relief for Emergency Services Volunteers in April. Thank you. This initiative was long overdue and our emergency service volunteers are extremely grateful.

These past 6 months have been extraordinarily busy, and infinitely rewarding. I am energized by the progress we’ve made and I’m excited by the work, and opportunities, which lie ahead. Together, we are forging ahead—we are working to improve our community—we are building a better Darien.

Thank you.